of the United States, North Korea and China." Secretary of State Powell also stated that "This is good news for the region. It is good news for North Korea, frankly, because it gives them the oppurtunity to present their positions, to come into this trilateral meeting and speak candidly in front of the United States and the Chinese with respect to their concerns; and it gives us the opportunity to do the same; and it gives the Chinese, who have a commitment to a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, to express their point of view as well".

Expenditure by Indian Missions and Posts

3663. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Rs. 756 crores in foreign exchange is being spent annually on our 156 Missions and Posts abroad;

(b) whether some austerity measures are being introduced and if so, the percentage of savings anticipated thereby;

(c) whether any study has been conducted towards relocation of some of the Indian Missions to make them cost effective; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) In accordance with Ministry of Finance guidelines, austerity meassures such as cut of 25% in DA rates for local tours by officials in Missions/Posts abroad and ban on purchase of new vehicles has been introduced. The effect of austerity measures is offset by increasing cost of living at stations abroad as well as on account of depreciation of Indian currency *vis-a-vis* major currencies of the world.

(c) and (d) The Ministry of reviews, on a regular basis, relocation of Indian Missions keeping in view the considerations of promotion of national interests in strategic, political, economic, commercial, consular and other spheres. In order to make our diplomatic representation cost effective, Ministry regularly looks at the possibility of covering countries through Concurrent Accreditation. Presently, India has disptomatic relations with 81 countries through Concurrent Accreditation.The Ministry also closed down 14 Missions during the last 12 years with a view to cutting down on expenditure.

The Ministry has also been actively pursuing a policy of purchase/ construction of properties abroad with a view to curtail expenditure on hiring of accommodation for Chancery and residences of India-based officers and staff members.

Indians in Pakistani jails

3664. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRI LALIT SURI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian nationals—civilian and defence personnel, separately, according to Government's estimates, at present languishing in Pakistani jails; and

(b) the steps taken during the last two years to seek their release and the results thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) As per available information, 883 Indian civilian prisoners, 245 fishermen and 54 missing Indian defence personnel are believed currently to be in Pakistani Jails.

(b) Government have consistently taken up the issue of release and repatriation of Indian prisoners with the Government of Pakistan through displomatic channels. As a resuslt, 39 civilian prisoners and 683 Indian fishermen were got released from Pakistan since January, 2001 to 17th April, 2003.

Social Security Cards

3665. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to issue National Social Security Cards to the EPF account holders; and

(b) if so, the purpose of this scheme and the amount involved as an expenditure on this scheme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI VIJAY GOEL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Employees' Provident Fund Organisation proposes to issue a unique National Social Security Number (NSSN) to the members brought under the purview of the Employees' Provident Fund